

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in San Francisco, California

October 15, 2009

Thank you. Thank you. Please, everybody, have a seat. Now, I am not going to spoil a good dinner with a long speech. *[Laughter]* But there are some big thank yous that I've got to say.

First of all, I've got to say something about my introducer. We are doing some tough stuff in Washington, and Mark is absolutely right that everybody has a story about Nancy's kindness and her thoughtfulness, her intelligence, her passion. I just want to say a little bit about her toughness. *[Laughter]*

Washington, unfortunately, I think, over the last several years has been engulfed with a climate that isn't just partisan, because we don't want to romanticize the past—things have always been partisan; that's the nature of democracy—but rather a sense that partisanship overrides the national interest. There's always been politics, but there's been a sense lately that goes beyond just the run of the mill politics; a sense that we are going to slash and burn and go after folks just because we want to win, as opposed to because we're trying to get something done. And as a consequence, being Speaker of the House is challenging job. You are constantly the target of attacks. And then there's the other party. *[Laughter]*

And yet, having now known Nancy first as a Senator and now as President, I can tell you that day in, day out, she faces down some of the toughest problems—not just policy problems, but political problems—that you can imagine, and she doesn't break a sweat. And she is willing to stare folks down and tell them how things are going to be. And that steel that Nancy Pelosi has is part of the reason why this has been such an incredibly productive Congress and why I'm so confident that we're going to end up getting health care done. And so I just want everybody to give Nancy Pelosi a big round of applause. I love Nancy Pelosi—love her.

Now, speaking of strong women, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer aren't around, but Dick and Stu are here to accept their accolades. *[Laughter]* I love them as well, and they have been showing extraordinary leadership on a whole host of issues.

To the people who helped to set this up this evening—Mark Gorenberg, along with Wendy, have just been diehard supporters from the very beginning of this unlikely journey. I'm grateful to them. Azita Raji, Doug Hickey, Denise Bauer, Steve Westly, Wade Randlett, and Jeff Bleich: We are so grateful to you for your willingness to step up and to support Democrats not just right before an election, but during these, sort of, trials, these periods where everybody is impatient and trying to figure out why we haven't transformed the world overnight.

And all of you understand that when I ran for office and we talked about change, I think all of you understood that change wasn't going to be easy. Change is hard. In a country of 300 million people, change is hard. And then in a world with several billion, arriving at a time when we were on the brink of the worst—we were on the brink of a great depression, the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression; at a time when our relationships with other countries all around the world were strained, to say the least; at a time of two wars and great danger; and a sense that on a whole host of big challenges, from health care to energy to the way our schools work to how our courts work to how we engage with one another, that we had

been stuck in a place that wasn't working for the future of the country. We had to understand that change was not going to be easy.

And what was so exciting about the campaign—not just mine, but the whole movement behind Democratic victories more than a year ago—was the recognition not just that people wanted change, but that I think the American people were hungry to take responsibility again for trying big things, for stretching out of our ruts and our comfort zones and our habits, and saying, "Well, let's see what it is that we can do to make this country work even better." We know we live in the greatest country on Earth, but, gosh, we also knew that there was this big gap between what was possible and where we were.

And so we came in, and we got busy. We went to work. And working with Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, we decided that we were not going to shy away from the tough stuff. We decided we weren't going to read the polls and see how we could calibrate and make sure that we didn't offend anybody. What we said was, there are some big challenges that nobody has taken on for a long time, and we're going to take them on. And some of those challenges were not of our making, and we decided we were going to take them on anyway.

So we passed a Recovery Act that has now brought us back from the brink of recession and also ended up being the largest investment in clean energy and the largest investment in infrastructure and the largest investment in educational reform that we've ever seen. And then we—as Nancy already mentioned, we ended up saying, you know, it's time to put science back on the front burner, and we ended up making sure that stem cell research was possible so that it could save lives and cure debilitating diseases. And then we said, you know, it makes sense for us to make sure that women are paid the same for the same work, and we signed the Lilly Ledbetter Act. And we gave insurance to 11 million children who had been left out of the Children's Health Insurance Program. And we moved forward, and we said, we are going to bring the war in Iraq to a responsible close. And we're going to close Guantanamo. And we are going to ban torture. *[Laughter]* And we are going to once again achieve the kind of moral primacy that America had previously been known for. And that was the easy stuff. *[Laughter]*

If we stopped today, this legislative session would have been one of the most productive in a generation—if we just stopped. But we didn't want to stop. And so we decided, you know what, we're tired of going to town hall meetings and hearing stories about parents who were worried about their children's health care coverage. We're tired of hearing stories about families going bankrupt because somebody got sick. And we said, yes, we know the insurance companies aren't going to like it and the drug companies are going to be uncertain about it and there's going to be a whole bunch of contention out there. But after decades of watching health care costs soar and coverage decline, we decided, we are going to take on health care, and we are now closer than we have ever been. And I am telling you this, people, we are going to get this done in the next couple of months, because Nancy Pelosi is committed to it, Harry Reid is committed to it, and I'm committed to it. We are going to get this done for the American people.

We passed a historic energy bill out of the House, and we are now making sure that the Senate moves forward because it's good for our economy, it is good for jobs, and by the way, it's good for the planet. And when I hear babies, you know, yelping back there—*[laughter]*—they're asking, are you going to make sure that this planet is at an appropriate temperature? *[Laughter]* That's what they're crying about. They don't know English yet—*[laughter]*. They don't know English yet, but that's what they're saying. *[Laughter]* And so we're going to get that done.

And we're going to reform our financial regulatory system, because we can't afford to have wild risk-taking on Wall Street end up resulting in massive layoffs and people losing their homes all across Main Street.

So—and by the way, we're just slipping in probably the most aggressive education reform agenda that we have seen in a very long time, but that's just—[*applause*]*—*we're not highlighting that.

Now, just in—people ask, "Well, what's been going on in Washington?" I want to make sure that you guys are well-informed. But I also don't want us to be complacent. I don't want us to be satisfied. We have to understand that folks are hurting out there. And they are scared, and many of them are angry, and although in some cases that anger may be misdirected, there's reason for people to be scared and to be angry. We've got the highest unemployment rate that we've seen in over 20 years. People are losing their homes. They're worried about the future. They're angry about the fact that even before this recession hit, their wages and incomes had flatlined.

And let's face it: Everybody in this room is very fortunate. There are a whole bunch of folks out there who just, day in, day out, it is a struggle, and they are working just as hard as you are and love their families just as much, and things are tough. And so when I wake up every single day, I'm thinking about how do I help those families, how do I make sure I'm putting them back to work. And it's not going to be easy, because we got into a big hole as a consequence of this financial crisis.

And then we've got real dangers all around the world. Iraq was hard; Afghanistan is harder. Iran seeking to develop nuclear weapons—that's hard; the Middle East peace process—that's hard—these are not problems that are going to be solved overnight. They're not going to be solved in 9 months, they're not going to be solved in 18 months, and they may not be solved, all of them, in 36 months.

But the main message I have for you is that that spirit that we carried into the campaign, that spirit doesn't die. That conviction that we can do better and that sense that the effort we put in—our determination, our persistence, our willingness to stand up to all kinds of nonsense and just keep at it, day in, day out—that animating spirit is what is going to make sure that when my Presidency is done, whenever that is, and Nancy's Speakership is done, whenever that is, that we're going to be able to look back and we're going to say, you know, this country is better, that we have made a difference in the lives not just of people today, but hopefully people tomorrow.

So I hope that all of you guys understand we're just getting started. See, some of our opponents, they seem to think that they could wear us down. And I just want everybody to be clear: I'm not tired; I'm refreshed. [*Laughter*] I am fired up. I am ready to go. We are not going to stop until we get health care done, until we've got an energy bill that we're proud of, until we are fixing schools all across America. We are not going to stop. They're going to get tired; we're not going to get tired. We're going to keep on going.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. Love you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:29 p.m. at the Westin St. Francis hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Richard C. Blum, husband of Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California; Stewart Boxer, husband of Sen. Barbara Boxer of California; Democratic Party campaign contributors Mark Gorenberg, Wendy Wanderman, Azita Raji, Doug Hickey, Denise Bauer, Steve Westly, and

Wade Randlett; and U.S. Ambassador-designate to Australia Jeff Bleich. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 16. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Democratic National Committee dinner in San Francisco, CA.

Locations: San Francisco, CA.

Names: Bauer, Denise; Bleich, Jeff; Blum, Richard C.; Boxer, Barbara; Boxer, Stewart; Feinstein, Dianne; Gorenberg, Mark; Hickey, Doug; Pelosi, Nancy; Raji, Azita; Randlett, Wade; Reid, Harry; Wanderman, Wendy; Westly, Steve.

Subjects: Afghanistan : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; California : Democratic Party events; California : President's visits; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker ; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Cuba : Guantanamo Bay, U.S. Naval Base, closure of detention facilities; Democratic Party : Democratic National Committee; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts ; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment rate; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Environment : Climate change ; Health and Human Services, Department of : State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Housing : Foreclosure rates; Iran : Nuclear weapons development; Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Middle East : Peace and democracy efforts ; Science and technology : Stem cell research.

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